



## Article

# May I Come In? EU Policies to Control Migration: The EUTF

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**Abstract:** What types of policies has the European Union (EU) implemented to control migration flows in recent decades, and what are their strategies? This paper aims to explore the measures developed by the EU to manage migration flows and identify how they operate. While a securitisation approach, such as activities of border control, has been widely discussed by scholars in this field, it is worth exploring and understanding other kinds of instruments aimed at curbing irregular flows through executing programs such as the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), developed in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings to address the “root causes” of the displacement. In light of this, this research conducts a case study and qualitative content and descriptive analysis of documents on the EUTF. Preliminary findings indicate patterns in what motivated the EU to undertake these actions and present the main strategies of the Fund in the North Africa region. However, some factors may have led to disappointing outcomes for the EUTF, such as the increase, in 2019, of nationals leaving the North Africa region towards Europe, as reported by UNDESA.

**Keywords:** European Union; policies; migration; Emergency Trust Fund for Africa; North Africa

## 1. Introduction

Migration has been a significant challenge for both non-governmental and international organisations. The issue becomes even more complex when developed economies attempt to regulate the flows from Global South countries (Gamso and Yuldashev 2018). The European Union (EU), for example, adopts various measures to control human mobility. But what types of policies have been created and implemented by this Community lately? What kind of strategies are they? The aim of this paper is to explore the actions developed by the EU to manage migration flows in recent decades, focusing on the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF). As stated by the literature (Huysmans 2000; Orsini 2017), these tools have been established based on the perception that migration is a security issue in the region.

Europe is the second most significant destination for migrants from Africa, with neighbouring countries of this continent occupying the first position. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA 2020), approximately 9 million Africans, which is 26% of the total, have migrated to Europe in the last few years—considering the recent 2015 refugee crisis—while 53% of people migrated to other African subregions. The North of Africa, composed of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, is considered a source of emigration (Idemudia and Boehnke 2020, p. 17) and the gate between Africa and Europe (Dadush et al. 2017, p. 4). That region is not only the origin of migrants but also a transit point for nationals from Sub-Saharan who leave their countries due to civil conflicts as one among other causes. However, migration from North Africa is primarily connected to political economic factors, which can be considered one of the reasons for the 2015 refugee crisis (Talani 2021). This issue raised concerns within the European Union, as noted by politicians and the media (Idemudia and Boehnke 2020, p. 16).

In 2016, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported a significant increase in irregular flows to Europe, particularly to Italy through the Western Mediter-



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anean, when compared to previous years. Around one million migrants have travelled through the main routes from North Africa. As a response to that crisis, the European Union has taken measures to increase security at its external borders and has worked with African nations to discourage people from leaving their home countries, providing billions of euros to programs under the EUTF to tackle the root causes of migration. Key aspects of this policy, presented in official documents, illustrate how relations between regions of source and destination are sustained through, first, the EU's justification for the necessity of applying these instruments and, second, the expectation that Africans must contribute to migration control. The implementation of such tools may help improve partnerships between the EU and African governments on migration.

To explore this topic and the strategies executed in the North Africa window, this research conducts a content and descriptive analysis of official documents on the EUTF. Based on a functionalist approach, it considers that the Fund is an externalized policy, seen as a way of expanding and legitimizing European actions beyond their borders (Lavenex 2014; Spijkerboer 2022). The sections of this paper include the theoretical context, empirical analysis and results, discussion, and conclusions. Preliminary findings indicate patterns of migration causes that motivated the EU to take action after the 2015 refugee crisis and present the main strategies of the Fund. Despite this policy, factors not considered by the EU may have led to disappointing outcomes, such as the increase, in 2019, of nationals leaving the North Africa region towards Europe as reported by UNDESA (2020).

## 2. The Theoretical Context

The marginalisation of regions such as North Africa contributes to the influx of migrants to the European Union (Talani 2021, chap. 3), pushing this bloc to define its own migration approach. EU institutions play a crucial role in establishing policies to handle the phenomena. For instance, the European Commission (EC) develops measures to control human mobility, while the European Council defines the EU's agenda on this issue (European Union 2023). EU migration policy can be seen as "the sum of all formalised instruments" (Niemann and Zaun 2023, p. 2973), generally considered by scholars a method of deterrence to prevent irregular migration (Orsini 2017; Rosina 2022).

According to Orsini (2017, p. 48), deterrence is one of the key strategies for influencing individuals to reconsider their decision to migrate, especially those who may find themselves in unauthorised circumstances upon reaching destination societies. Likewise, Rosina (2022, p. 59) argues deterring is "a strategy meant to discourage irregular migration to a country, through potential migrants' fear of negative consequences". In this sense, migrants are persuaded that the benefits of leaving their home countries are much lower than associated costs of doing so (Rosina 2022, p. 78). However, the efficacy of border control, as an example of deterrence, is limited in effectively regulating crossings (Rosina 2022, p. 46).

It is open to debate whether this limitation is one of the factors prompting the European Union to employ diverse strategies to stop unwanted migration flows, particularly by addressing the root causes as a solution. In recent decades, these kinds of measures have been largely used by the EU with the collaboration of partner countries and international organisations. Hence, at least three types of policies to stop migration from third countries can be mentioned: coercive, repressive, and preventive (López-Sala 2015 as cited in Rosina 2022, p. 48).

The former two are closely related to the securitisation of migration approach, examples of which include advanced surveillance technologies and border control. These activities originate from positions of power, through which politicians maintain their "symbolic control over territorial boundaries" (Bigo 2002, pp. 65, 73, 74). The latter is usually centred on the causes of displacement by providing opportunities to local nationals through development assistance programs, trade, foreign direct investment, and foreign policy initiatives (Boswell 2003, pp. 619–20). The European Union Emergency Trust Fund for

Africa (EUTF) is an illustration of such actions. It was created in response to the 2015 refugee crisis, and it was implemented in both regions of origin and transit for migrants.

This section presents the main EU migration policies, highlights the differences among them, and contextualises the period during which the EUTF was elaborated.

### *2.1. Contextualising the EU Migration Control*

Since the mid-1990s, migration has become a security concern for the European Union (Huysmans 2000). But why is it perceived as a threat? There could be several explanations for this question. From Huysmans' (2000, p. 766) point of view, the mobility containment policies in Europe are associated with nationalism, chauvinism, and confirmed xenophobia against migrants. Non-Western cultures are generally viewed as a potential danger that could destabilise societies. In the case of the EU, this perception was developed during its institutionalisation process as a Community (Huysmans 2000). Yet migrants from the Global South are negatively associated with a burden for destination countries in the North. Societal and economic causes may explain why nationals from third countries are sometimes unwelcome.

As Talani (2021) argues, the region's sources of migrants, such as North Africa, are not fully integrated into the international political economy. Migration can be seen as a result of political and economic challenges in these regions, as people sometimes leave their home countries in an attempt to find jobs and better opportunities of living. Hence, finding solutions to that problem becomes a priority for host societies, especially considering the underground economy as one of the pull factors for irregular flows towards Europe (Talani 2021, p. 212). When migrants take informal jobs, there is a likelihood of a political backlash against them, increasing the criminalisation of migration (Talani 2021, p. 198). Taking such matters into account, common regulations were deemed necessary to manage the influx of people coming to the Old Continent.

The signing of the Schengen Agreement in 1989, which resulted in the abolition of internal borders between European countries while strengthening external borders through the improvement of surveillance, is also considered a reason for labelling migrants as a threat (Orsini 2017). Whilst the Community citizens acquired more freedom to cross borders inside the region, people coming from outside had to face more restrictions, which involves technological collaboration between border police and practices like regulating the fingerprinting of asylum seekers (Talani 2021, p. 176).

More recently, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) operates as one of the most common security tools of the EU to stop crossings on both land and maritime borders (Iov and Bogdan 2017). This agency was created in 2004 under the European Council and offers crucial support to both EU member states and the Schengen agreement signatories.

These restrictive practices of border control in Europe have sparked debates regarding their effectiveness, especially when illegal crossings still occur at almost the same rate as the influx throughout the last few years. The increasing number of apprehensions of migrants is due in part to the lack of evidence that deterrence effectively prevents arriving in Europe (Orsini 2017, p. 50). On the other hand, migration has become more dangerous due to the intensification of border control (Pradella and Taghdisi Rad 2017, p. 8). People find different routes to reach the destination, even if it means putting their lives at risk.

Handling this phenomenon through alternative means was not only strategic but also imperative for finding better solutions to the ongoing problem, especially from the European Union's perspective, which serves as a global example of the promotion of human rights and common regulations regarding various topics, particularly migration. In 2015, the EU established the EUTF to address the root causes of irregular migration, a policy implemented in response to the crisis resulting from the upheavals of the Arab Spring (Den Hertog 2016).

The EUTF collaborated with 26 partners across Africa, including North Africa, and focused on four strategic objectives: creating greater economic employment opportunities,

strengthening the resilience of communities, improving migration management, and enhancing governance and conflict prevention (European Union 2024). The funds approved were also allocated for rescuing people at sea in the Mediterranean. As it will be evident in the following sections, alongside the EUTF documents, there are several mentions of the concern in helping vulnerable people while they are trying to reach Europe by dangerous means. Still, the largest portion of the fund was allocated to migration governance and border protection, while from 2016 to 2019, the second-largest amount of the fund was due to programs dedicated to advancing economic growth and employment opportunities (Zaun and Nantermoz 2021, p. 519).

Efforts like allocating funds to tackle the root causes of migration are often viewed as external measures, yet the term lacks a precise definition. The externalisation of migration, also referred to as “the external dimension”, was originally developed in the EU studies and implies that migration is also addressed by the European Union’s external relations (Fontana and Rosina 2024, p. 3). According to Niemann and Zaun (2023, p. 2965), it can be understood as “any policy aimed at managing migration beyond the borders of EU member states”. Thus, the term “externalisation” could encompass scenarios where policies typically enacted in Europe are replicated elsewhere, along with collaboration with third countries. According to a functionalist perspective, externalised instruments may influence third countries without controlling them (Lavenex 2014). For these policies to be executed, they must involve collaboration from regions of origin and of destination of migrants.

In that regard, externalisation of policies to manage the phenomenon may be executed by joint border control, readmissions agreements and multilateral aid programs, for example (Niemann and Zaun 2023, p. 2965). The EUTF can be seen as a policy that integrates all these activities. In this sense, countries are not able to handle the problem of irregular migration by themselves, but rather with the support of external agents, such as other states or international organisations. Taking this into account, the EUTF is implemented according to two criteria: first, by conditionality, and second, by transgovernmental networking (Spijkerboer 2022, p. 2898; Lavenex 2014). This Fund can be seen as a package deal among actors, including not just third countries but also international organizations (Spijkerboer 2022, p. 2898). Additionally, transgovernmental networking means that there is a policy transfer through technical joint actions, emphasizing cooperation with authorities rather than imposing policies on other states (Spijkerboer 2022).

The EU began developing this kind of tool in the 1990s with various projects financed and organised by member states and the Union in cooperation with non-EU neighbouring countries like Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco (Orsini 2017). The EUTF was not only implemented as an externalised policy, but it was also counted with EU’s member states’ support as donors of the programmes. This approach may be classified as an externalisation policy because among the various methods of this dimension, one involves addressing the root causes of migration (Fontana and Rosina 2024, p. 3), which was the primary factor behind the establishment of the fund. Although the reasons for its establishment are not new, it is worth noting that documents on the EUTF indicate patterns about what might be seen as root causes of migration and how the strategies of the programmes implemented in Africa aimed to achieve their goals. In the following section, we investigate the circumstances that led to the creation of this instrument, discussing the causes of irregular migration influx from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) towards Europe in recent years.

## 2.2. A Background on the Political and Economic Factors: The Refugee Crisis

Recent migration influx following the upheavals that began in Tunisia in the early 2010s is considered a result of governments failing to provide solutions for a declining economy. This is one of the causes of migrants fleeing MENA countries for Europe in recent years. Nonetheless, this context appears to have had little impact on migration patterns in North African countries, particularly from Egypt (Talani 2021, p. 105).

Although the number of individuals moving across borders within the same region greatly exceeds those migrating to neighbouring continents, European leaders and citizens



believe recent irregular migration flows are the effect of the mismanagement and civil wars in North Africa (Attinà 2016). But the fact is that peoples' standard of living in their home countries has worsened, especially in regions lacking strong integration in the International Political Economy; thus, they have chosen to migrate to regions where they may find the assurance of certain civil, political, and human rights (Talani 2021, pp. 125, 204).

The North of Africa is an important region not only due to its geographical dimensions but also as a significant source of migrants and a transit point for people from Sub-Saharan Africa, West Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Middle East (European Union 2024). Furthermore, Mediterranean routes are the most used means for people to reach Europe (Talani 2021, p. 784). This crisis was a crucial event for the external dimension of the EU migration control to become "the most dynamic strand" (Niemann and Zaun 2023, p. 2965). For instance, the EU reinforced the involvement of countries such as Libya in border control (Orsini 2017, p. 46).

According to Zaun and Nantermoz (2021, p. 516), there were no durable solutions on the internal side to handle this problem, though the cooperation among member states regarding the relocation of asylum seekers in the regions was one of the options to deal with the event. The crisis also accelerated the implementation of new policies and reinforced old ones, such as the expansion of FRONTEX's role and resources (Niemann and Zaun 2023, p. 2967), by strengthening its border control with support from this Agency to deter illegal migrants from crossing the borders.

Actions such as Operation Sophia and Triton were launched. While the former is an EU naval operation against human smugglers and traffickers in the Mediterranean Sea, initiated in 2015 (Niemann and Zaun 2023, p. 2967), the latter started to be executed in November 2014 and operated until 2018, focusing on rescuing people at sea in vessels (FRONTEX 2017). Besides that, the EC put forward proposals highlighting the need to take immediate action by initiating discussions on migration, mobility, and security with Tunisia, Morocco, and Libya (European Commission 2011).

The Emergency Trust Fund for Africa was regarded at the time as one of the most crucial responses to the challenges posed by migration flows, as was highlighted by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in a press conference at the time (European Commission 2015). Therefore, the instability in North Africa during the Arab Spring, along with other causes of migration such as conflicts in subregions of the African continent, were considered primary drivers and valid reasons for the creation of the EUTF, which involved collaboration with third countries, notably Libya.

In view of the above-mentioned, this research employs a case study approach and a qualitative content and descriptive analysis to identify patterns and characteristics within the texts regarding the strategies of the policy to manage migration (Kohlbacher 2006; Elo and Kyngäs 2008). Examining the connection between source and destination regions of migrants poses several challenges, particularly due to the difficulty in finding data on the influx and its inaccuracy (Rosina 2022, p. 47). A qualitative approach can shed light on the content of the EU's rationale for devising strategies to manage migratory flows, such as programmes under the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. A content analysis helps to comprehend the insights and themes through texts, identifying whether there is a repetition of actions to control migration over the years. According to Zardo (2022, p. 586), "the EUTF as a case under scrutiny is an important empirical contribution to the rich debate on the EU migration policy".

This study is also based on functionalist terms (Lavenex 2014; Spijkerboer 2022). The aim is to elucidate the key strategies identified by the EU to justify the implementation of external migration tools, supporting third countries by asserting that these policies can aid in their development capacities and provide opportunities for their nationals, while simultaneously reducing the need to migrate. The analysis draws upon documents such as the Valletta Summit Action Plan, six annual reports (2016–2021), nine board meetings (2015–2022), two of which occurred in 2018—one in April and another in September of the

same year—as well as Press Releases. All the documents on the EUTF were obtained from the European Union’s official websites.

Before proceeding with the empirical analysis, it is worth providing an overview by answering questions based on [Elo and Kyngäs’ \(2008, p. 109\)](#) reasoning for a content analysis: (1) who is telling? In this case, it is the European Union, which is the source of the documents analysed; (2) where is this happening? The answer is Europe, since the policies are implemented to manage migration flows arriving in this region; (3) when did it happen? The EUTF was approved during the Valletta Summit in 2015, with additional documents and meetings documented in the following years, as detailed in the next section; (4) what is happening? The elaboration and implementation of the EUTF; (5) why? The EUTF is an important tool to handle the challenges posed by migration, as Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker asserted ([European Commission 2015](#)).

Finally, the article presents a data description of irregular migration from 2015 to 2020, provided by UNDESA and FRONTEX (See Appendix A—Table A1), considering the literature argument that funds allocated to addressing the root causes of migration in the countries of origin and transit of migrants are not able to halt unwanted migration ([De Haas 2007](#); [Orsini 2017](#)). This discussion is important as it seems the EU itself acknowledges that not all expected outcomes will be achieved, though maintaining relations with third countries of origin and transit remains a priority to manage migration.

### 3. Empirical Analysis and Results

The EUTF is a policy established under the European Development Fund ([European Union 2015](#), p. 5), and managed by the Directorate General of European Neighbourhood Policy and Engagement ([Castillejo 2016](#)). Adopting a minimum of 254 projects valued at EUR 4.9 billion to the programmes, it focused on the development, support, and creation of employment and opportunities for migrants ([Niemann and Zaun 2023](#), pp. 2969–70). It was implemented in 26 countries across various regions of the African continent, known as windows for the execution of its programs: the Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa, and North Africa. This section provides detailed information regarding the strategies and main results of this instrument by making reference to the official documents.

#### 3.1. The EUTF: From Elaboration to Implementation

The Valletta Summit on Migration, held on 11–12 November 2015, marked the initial stride in the formation of the EUTF. Bringing together heads of State and Government from African nations and the EU, its primary focus was addressing the complexities of irregular migration ([European Council 2015](#)). The Summit resulted in the adoption of a political declaration and an Action Plan, which formally launched the EUTF ([Castillejo 2016](#)), and delineating five pivotal areas: (1) tackling the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, (2) bolstering cooperation on legal migration and mobility, (3) strengthening the protection of migrants and asylum seekers, (4) combating irregular migration, migrant smuggling, and human trafficking, and (5) enhancing collaboration on return, readmission, and reintegration ([European Council 2015](#)).

During the Summit, participants reached a consensus on the Constitutive Agreement establishing the EUTF, signed by the European Commission, 25 member states, Norway, and Switzerland ([European Union 2015](#)). It emphasised that “Migration and mobility are a priority in the relation between EU and Africa” ([European Union 2015](#), p. 4). Key factors contributing to “irregular migration” that are mentioned in this document include “conflict”, “poverty”, “political instability”, “deteriorated economic environment”, and “youth unemployment” ([European Union 2015](#), p. 3). Additionally, the document highlights the growing nexus between security challenges and activities of terrorist groups and illicit trafficking and underscores the role of North Africa as a transit point for irregular migrants ([European Union 2015](#), p. 3).

It is evident that the members of the EUTF perceive irregular migration as an outcome connected to poverty and struggling economies. Moreover, it seems that from the EU’s

point of view, the failure of third countries to provide better solutions for their economy and jobs to their nationals predominates as a cause of migration over other factors. However, what if this is one of the reasons for the difficulty in effectively managing flows? The EUTF has demanded a huge amount of collaboration from all sides, but it mainly depends on the willingness of local governments to find resolutions for their own local problems. What if the governments are not able or interested in doing so? The questions mentioned above do not cover the entire purpose of this investigation. They could just serve as a starting point for a future discussion on collaborating with third countries in this regard.

During the EUTF's execution, the EC periodically published summaries of the fund's activities through Annual Reports from 2016 to 2021. Despite the persistent problems of the migration, these documents demonstrate that the EUTF was implemented in practice, outlining several strategies employed in North Africa, and affirm that they were yielding good results. In order to give an answer to these challenges, the partners agreed on some priorities. They have mentioned that it is important to work on "providing aid", "development assistance", "border management", and, last but not least, "fostering synergies between migration and development", alongside social and political development efforts, focusing on third countries of origin and transit and on the Mediterranean routes (European Union 2015).

Moreover, European Union official platforms on the EUTF underlined documents of Board Meetings that were held to oversee the fund's implementation across origin and transit regions of migrants from 2015 to 2022. Led by the EC, the meetings presented the agenda endorsed by partner countries, donors, and international organisations for implementing EUTF activities.

Finally, the Press Releases disseminated information to members and society regarding new funds or investments in programs under the EUTF. The Annual Reports, Board Meetings, and Press Releases are detailed in the following subsections, reflecting their substantial content in contrast to the documents from the Action Plan and the Constitutive Agreement. The formats of these latter two documents have already been discussed above.

### 3.1.1. The Activities of the Fund: The Annual Reports of the North of Africa Window

The European Commission released Annual Reports each year after the programs on the EUTF were implemented. To explore these strategies in the North Africa window, we selected the section on "Strategic Orientations, Implementations, and Results" from the documents, particularly focusing on the subsection pertaining to that region of the African continent. Table 1 presents detailed information regarding the main strategies, programs, and achievements mentioned in this section.

The EUTF is a complex tool. It aims not only to promote development but also to prevent dangerous crossings at sea, as was especially highlighted by the 2019 AR. The primary criterion for establishing this fund was precisely the crisis of people risking themselves to cross the Mediterranean.

Additionally, countries covered by the EUTF were experiencing emergencies in their own contexts (Spijkerboer 2022, p. 2895). The 2016 AR is a clear example of this, highlighting the capacities of the partner countries of the EUTF "to establish functioning policy" (European Commission 2017, p. 40). This is exemplified by the project that provided support to businesses run by nationals from Tunisia living abroad, especially in France and Germany. The main goal of this program was to improve the economy of Tunisia, empower young people, and create jobs (European Union 2021). Local authorities were responsible for implementing these policies. However, the report did not clarify whether those migrants intended to return to their home country even after accessing these opportunities. One of the main problems identified from the AR documents concerns the outcomes of the actions presented.

**Table 1.** This table provides the content of the EUTF Annual Reports about North Africa.

Annual Reports (AR/2016–2021)	EUTF's Strategies and Results
2016 AR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The projects worthed a total of EUR 64.5 million and focused on:</li> <li>■ Improving migration governance—reinforcing the capacity of North African countries institutions and their capacity building on legislative and regulatory issues (<a href="#">European Commission 2017</a>, p. 39).</li> <li>■ Advancing mutually beneficial legal migration and mobility—improving skills and strengthening of labour market, creating jobs (<a href="#">European Commission 2017</a>, pp. 39–40).</li> <li>■ Ensuring protection for those in need—supporting repatriation and integration of vulnerable migrants in Libya (<a href="#">European Commission 2017</a>, pp. 40–41).</li> <li>■ Addressing the drivers of irregular migration—supporting economic and social programmes in areas of origin, creating employment and education opportunities, especially for young people and women (<a href="#">European Commission 2017</a>, p. 40).</li> <li>■ Improving information and the protection of vulnerable migrants along the migratory route—Central and Western Mediterranean routes (<a href="#">European Commission 2017</a>, p. 42).</li> </ul>
2017 AR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The <a href="#">European Commission (2018, p. 56)</a> stated in 2017 there was an increase in the formulation and implementation of activities in comparison to 2016.</li> <li>■ Eight new programmes were approved for a total amount of EUR 232.5 million.</li> <li>■ Libya became the priority, particularly in the protection sector (<a href="#">European Commission 2018</a>, p. 56).</li> <li>■ Programmes focused on country support in monitoring, evaluation, and communication for improved migration management, to support a migration governance approach based on human rights, integration, and inclusion of migrants (<a href="#">European Commission 2018</a>, p. 56).</li> <li>■ Other programmes included the areas of asylum and protection (<a href="#">European Commission 2017</a>, p. 61).</li> <li>■ At least one component addressed the protection of vulnerable migrants along the routes (<a href="#">European Commission 2018</a>, p. 65).</li> </ul>
2018 AR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ On 31 December 2018, a total of 21 actions for EUR 582.2 million were approved.</li> <li>■ The programmes focused on the improved migration management (<a href="#">European Commission 2019</a>, p. 35).</li> <li>■ The main activities implemented were: 1. support for improved migration governance; 2. support to labour migration and mobility; 3. protection of vulnerable migrants, voluntary return and sustainable reintegration, as well as community stabilisation (including through support to municipalities along migration routes); 4. integrated border management (<a href="#">European Commission 2019</a>, p. 35).</li> <li>■ The North of Africa window adopted a EUR 50 million action supporting Libya geographically and financially, with particular focus on the main migration routes (<a href="#">European Commission 2019</a>, p. 40).</li> <li>■ The EUTF approved an initiative of EUR 40 million supporting Morocco to develop its border management system (<a href="#">European Commission 2019</a>, p. 41).</li> </ul>
2019 AR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The programmes focused on improving migration management.</li> <li>■ Over 185,000 non-food items, hygiene kits, and more than 60,000 medical consultations were provided as emergency assistance (<a href="#">European Commission 2020</a>, p. 36).</li> <li>■ Over 1.7 million people had access to basic services (<a href="#">European Commission 2020</a>, p. 36).</li> <li>■ Libyan authorities were trained on search and rescue to improve border management and to prevent loss of lives at sea (<a href="#">European Commission 2020</a>, p. 36).</li> <li>■ In total, 1954 emergency accommodation provided to vulnerable migrants, and 120 multipurpose police vehicles delivered to Moroccan authorities (<a href="#">European Commission 2020</a>, p. 37).</li> <li>■ Around 60 Tunisian public servants were trained to improve migration management in the country (<a href="#">European Commission 2020</a>, p. 37).</li> <li>■ Entrepreneurship and business training provided to 301 people in Egypt (<a href="#">European Commission 2020</a>, p. 38).</li> </ul>



Table 1. Cont.

Annual Reports (AR/2016–2021)	EUTF's Strategies and Results
2020 AR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A total of 30,000 migrants had access to information regarding the risks of migrating irregularly (European Commission 2021, p. 39).</li> <li>■ In Morocco, 7600 migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers were informed about their rights to access health services; law teachers and students received training on asylum law (European Commission 2021, p. 39).</li> <li>■ The EUTF Africa adopted a EUR 20 million COVID-19 response programme (European Commission 2021, p. 40).</li> </ul>
2021 AR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In Libya, 5,565,000 people received information on COVID-19 prevention and access to services (European Commission 2020).</li> <li>■ Medical assistance was provided for people in Morocco (European Commission 2020).</li> <li>■ In Tunisia, 30 enterprises were established with 142 new jobs created (European Commission 2020).</li> <li>■ In Egypt, sub-projects were implemented with NGOs related to health, environment, and education sectors (European Commission 2022, p. 35).</li> <li>■ The programmes provided nutrition and food-security assistance and cash assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission 2022, p. 36).</li> <li>■ The border management was strengthened, especially in Libya (European Commission 2022, p. 37).</li> </ul>

Source: Elaborated by the author.

Border management and concern with the most common routes for migrants continued as priorities in the strategies for managing the flows. Moreover, during the concluding stages of program implementation funded by the EUTF, the predominant focus shifted towards addressing challenges posed by COVID-19. This included particular attention to the virus's spread among individuals crossing borders and their heightened vulnerability to it. Consequently, the EUTF prioritised aiding vulnerable populations by disseminating relevant information on health matters. In that context, the pandemic became one more reason for tightening border management in Europe.

In summary, the reports revealed that the main strategy of the EUTF in North Africa was to improve migration management, executed by the countries of origin of migrants and by facilitating migrants' access to opportunities in their local areas. It is also clear from these documents that the European Union did not work alone but had the support of organisations such as IOM and UNICEF. Notwithstanding, IOM's policies may not always be aligned with the Community agenda, taking into consideration that the organisation also operates independently in various areas of migration, especially in humanitarian assistance. Despite the purpose of the collaboration being to gain insights or boost migration control, sometimes the differences between the institutions and their actions might be a hurdle in this regard and might pose a challenge to the effectiveness of policies of migration control.

### 3.1.2. The EUTF Agenda: Board Meetings

The main goal of the Board Meetings was to present the agenda adopted by partners, donors of the EUTF, as well as some regional organisations, such the African Union (mentioned in the fourth and ninth board meetings). Table 2 outlines primary topics discussed among EUTF members regarding programs that should be approved and implemented, for example. The first Meeting was held in 2015, following the approval of the EUTF and the proposed agenda by the EU (European Union 2019a).

Overall, the documents covered similar topics addressed by the European Union, following a pattern of proposed actions, especially regarding the North of Africa window. During both the fourth and fifth meetings in 2018, partner countries emphasised the need to enhance migration management along the Mediterranean routes.

The Director for International and Horizontal Affairs of DG HOME, Mr. Henrik Nielsen, declared "the Trust Fund has achieved a lot of thanks to the policy dialogue with African partners and has ensured complementarity with other programs" (European

Union 2019a). Nevertheless, throughout the meetings held over the years, various concerns emerged regarding the involvement of African nations and the need for clearer delineation of the budget allocated for proposed programs. Yet these documents make it clear that North Africa has been a focal point in managing migration and addressing the underlying causes of irregular and illegal flows. Managing the flows is not an easy task, since the concern was raised regarding the various route alternatives for migrants from Africa aiming to reach Europe.

**Table 2.** This table provides the content of the EUTF Board Meetings.

Board Meetings (2015–2022)	Meetings' Agenda and Topics Discussed
1st/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It focused on the presentation, exchange and adoption of the EUTF strategies (European Union 2019a).</li> <li>■ The participants of this meeting requested that programs should prioritise children, youth, and women, and address irregular migration in North Africa (European Union 2019a).</li> </ul>
2nd/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It highlighted principles of the EUTF, especially regarding the creation of employment opportunities to address the root causes of migration and managing borders considering security concerns (European Union 2019a).</li> <li>■ It presented an overview of what has been implemented in all the regions covered by the programmes of the EUTF. According to the European Commission (2019), overall, all the board members have been content with the results in that year.</li> <li>■ The chair of the meeting emphasised the importance of creating jobs, noting the youth, due to the “(i) strong correlation between lack of employment and willingness to migrate” (European Union 2019a).</li> </ul>
3rd/2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Board had decided to be more selective in terms of programmes to be funded (European Union 2019a).</li> <li>■ Mr. C. Danielson, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, “reiterated that the Central Mediterranean route continues to be a source of great concern in terms of migratory pressure on Europe and that Libya”, emphasising the focus of the EUTF should be in the North Africa window (European Union 2019a).</li> <li>■ The meeting outlined strategic priorities, with a focus in North Africa on addressing the root causes of irregular migration, enhancing the safeguarding of vulnerable migrants along their journey, improving migration governance, and promoting mutually beneficial legal migration and mobility (European Union 2019a).</li> </ul>
4th/2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It presented advancements in new approvals, signed contracts, and disbursements, as well as the progress made along the Central Mediterranean Route through voluntary migrant return and reintegration efforts from Libya, mainly, and other nations to their respective countries of origin (European Union 2019a).</li> </ul>
5th/2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It held an evaluation of the activities implemented under the EUTF in Africa. The possibility of the Fund being carried after 2020 was also discussed (European Union 2019a).</li> <li>■ It addressed the necessity of better management of migration in the routes from Africa to Europe, especially in the Central Mediterranean route, which is the priority of the fund (European Union 2019a).</li> <li>■ Italy, for instance, reiterated that the focus on the implementation of strategies should be in Libya and Tunisia (European Union 2019a).</li> </ul>
6th/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Director-General of DG NEAR, Mr. Danielsson, highlighted the challenges due to the increase of irregular migrants on the Western Mediterranean Route (European Union 2019a).</li> <li>■ The meeting also emphasised significant results of the EUTF in North Africa. For example, in Libya, nearly 90,000 migrants received medical assistance, and more than 3600 refugees and asylum seekers were transferred from Libya to Niger for resettlement funded by the EUTF (European Union 2019a).</li> <li>■ Additionally, substantive support was provided to Morocco to manage borders (European Union 2019a).</li> </ul>

Table 2. Cont.

Board Meetings (2015–2022)	Meetings' Agenda and Topics Discussed
7th/ 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ According to the <a href="#">European Commission (2019)</a>, achievements and results were expected regarding monitoring and learning systems, for example, in response to COVID-19 and increased budget.</li> <li>■ In 2020, Libya remained the partner country with the biggest portfolio in the region, the most monitored by the fund (<a href="#">European Union 2019a</a>).</li> <li>■ Confirmation of the extension of the EUTF for Africa in 2021 (<a href="#">European Union 2019a</a>).</li> </ul>
8th/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This meeting addressed the primary achievements of the EUTF, particularly highlighting the focus on migration management in the North Africa region.</li> <li>■ It discussed the challenges posed by COVID-19 to the most vulnerable people (<a href="#">European Union 2019a</a>).</li> <li>■ The chair of the meeting also underlined “the need to carry on working on common priorities, and cooperation such as protection and resettlement mechanisms, agreements and best practices on readmission and return” (<a href="#">European Union 2019a</a>).</li> </ul>
9th/2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The <a href="#">European Commission (2019)</a> reported that the number of people missing in the Mediterranean Sea and irregular migration decreased since the launch of the EUTF.</li> <li>■ The regions were covered but the EUTF were still facing challenges due to COVID-19, which became a reason for a new rise of flows post-COVID-19 (<a href="#">European Union 2019a</a>).</li> <li>■ Dialogue on developing regular migration (<a href="#">European Union 2019a</a>).</li> <li>■ Finally, the EUTF improved border management, the fight against traffickers and smugglers in Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt (<a href="#">European Union 2019a</a>).</li> </ul>

Source: Elaborated by the author.

### 3.1.3. New Actions: The Press Releases

In 2018, the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, pointed out the importance of working together with southern neighbours, affirming that benefits could be brought to partner countries, migrants, and Europe ([European Union 2018a](#)). This statement illustrates how significant collaboration from third countries is for the EU in managing irregular migration. However, it is worth acknowledging that African and European leaders have distinct priorities in this matter. African governments, for example, do not demonstrate much enthusiasm in controlling irregular flows to Europe ([Boersma et al. 2022](#)).

The main reason for these governments not being interested in managing irregular migration flows seems to be the connection between the phenomena and their causes, rather than how migrants impact destination societies. For example, at the Valleta Summit, the European Union was more preoccupied with these flows, whilst African leaders wanted to establish conditions to promote legal migration ([Castillejo 2016](#), p. 12). To achieve the goal of focusing on legal migration, it is essential to offer options for nationals of third countries regarding access to the labour market in receiving countries or provide scholarships for students, for instance.

Nevertheless, the EU continued to focus its strategy on managing irregular flows by implementing new actions, especially in budgets to improve border control, meanwhile, the programs approved previously in the meetings have already been put into practice in Africa. Still in 2018, two press releases regarding initiatives in North Africa, one in July and another in December, announced additional allocations to the EUTF. In July, the new program was worth EUR 90.5 million to enhance border management and protect migrants in North Africa, assisting vulnerable migrants and strengthening the border management capabilities of African partner nations ([European Union 2018a](#)). In December, supplementary actions were communicated with the aim of “aiding vulnerable migrants, advancing socio-economic progress and bolstering border control in North Africa” ([European Union 2018b](#)).

The EU's argument for the implementation of such new programmes was centred on saving lives and combating traffickers and smugglers, particularly in conjunction with partner countries, especially Libya, along migratory routes, as Federica Mogherini, the High Representative/Vice-President, addressed at the time (European Union 2018a). In turn, Commissioner Johannes Hahn emphasised the critical importance of engaging partner countries of origin and transit to efficiently tackle the complexities of irregular migration and border governance. According to him, this initiative would "offer tangible technical and financial assistance to safeguard and rescue individuals, tackle irregular migration, promote regional movement, and enhance border administration" (European Union 2018b).

In 2019, two significant actions took place. The first was announced in a press release in July, while the second occurred in December. The former condemned the centres of detention for migrants in Libya, citing violations of human rights principles and calling for their cessation (European Union 2019a). The EC endorsed five new migration-focused initiatives in North Africa, with a total budget of EUR 61.5 million, aiming to improve existing efforts to safeguard and aid refugees and vulnerable migrants in North Africa, particularly in Libya (European Union 2019a). The action of attempting to make people remain where they are facing abuses is controversial, as it contradicts the objectives the EU was trying to achieve regarding human rights, even if the budget has been allocated to help displaced persons.

Though, in December 2019, the EU issued "new initiatives amounting to nearly €150 million", designed to assist Morocco in combating human smuggling and irregular migration. However, this strategy also covered support for vulnerable migrants stranded in Libya through voluntary repatriation (European Union 2019b). Once again, individuals have been convinced to return to the area where they may have been in vulnerability. What is particularly noteworthy is that these actions served as means to further deepen dialogue with North African countries to manage the flows. Olivér Várhelyi, responsible for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, remarked: "With this new package we are deepening our partnership with Morocco to further reduce irregular arrivals on the Western Mediterranean route and prevent people risking their lives" (European Union 2019b).

Finally, in 2020, the European Union introduced a fresh aid package designed to bolster support for vulnerable communities and combat the effects of COVID-19 across North Africa. Libya and Tunisia emerged as key recipients of this assistance. Within the North Africa window, Libya stood out as the primary beneficiary, receiving an allocation of EUR 455 million dedicated to various initiatives (European Union 2020). These endeavours primarily focused on safeguarding migrants and refugees, promoting community stabilisation, and improving border management measures. They also included the strengthening of capabilities of the Libyan Coast Guard and Port Security for search and rescue operations, as well as combating migrant smuggling (European Union 2020). Meanwhile, in Tunisia, the main objective of the new initiatives was to enhance the accessibility of health assistance for vulnerable populations (European Union 2020).

From all that has been explored, apparently the policies aimed at tackling migration are more connected to EU political priorities than to the local third countries' needs (Castillejo 2016, p. 20), which raises a question: could collaboration from countries of origin and transit of migrants enhance the strategy in addressing the root causes of migration for better management of irregular flows? One could argue that the EU established the EUTF with the political aim of providing a response to the society, especially in light of the number of people arriving in Europe in the period of the 2015 refugee crisis.

### 3.2. It May Not Be a Sufficient Policy

Strategies such as the EUTF may be necessary, but not sufficient to reduce unwanted migration. Despite the establishment of the Fund, in 2019, UNDESA recorded a higher number of arrivals from North African countries, with approximately a total of 4,705,002 people leaving the region. The number of arrivals increased significantly compared to 2015's record of 2,480,623 people, including categories of irregular migration and asylum

seekers (UNDESA 2020). Also, the number of apprehensions of illegal migrants increased in 2017 and 2019, reaching 23,063 and 23,969, respectively (FRONTEX 2021). In 2021, FRONTEX reported that around 7004 individuals were apprehended at the border upon arrival from north African countries.

Even amid the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the implementation of various measures to curb its spread in 2020, a substantial influx of people continued to arrive in Europe from North Africa, totalling approximately 5,133,036 individuals (UNDESA 2020). Additionally, FRONTEX (2021) documented a total of 17,228 apprehensions during the same year. Frontex did not specify the ultimate destination of those migrants, but it can be assumed that among them, people were likely returned to their countries of origin. At the time, the Agency reported only the number of illegal crossings detected and the number of apprehensions. The data were collected from UNDESA and FRONTEX within the period of 2015 to 2020, which coincides with the implementation of the EUTF. UNDESA published the number of migration flows every two years, except for between 2019 and 2020. The overall description of this data can be found in Appendix A—Table A1.

Upon assessing those numbers, the question remains if the EUTF initiatives may be sufficient policies to address root causes of irregular migration. As Orsini (2017), De Haas (2007), and Boersma et al. (2022) argue, the funding allocated for these programs failed to yield the anticipated outcomes for the European Union. During the implementation of these programs, there was also an alarming rise in border control measures and incidents of violence by border guards, especially in Libya (Boersma et al. 2022, p. 5).

Taking all of that into account, at least three factors may have led to disappointing outcomes for the EUTF that were not considered by the EU: First, the ongoing sea crossings; second, the extension of the fund; and third, divergences between the EU and African governments. It is important to highlight that this study has a limitation concerning the primary source of data, which consists of European Union official documents. This may be considered problematic as these documents represent only one perspective within a specific context. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, content analysis allows us to discern the underlying motivations behind the implementation of policies such as the EUTF by examining what is emphasized by the bloc's official institutions and how these instruments' effects are intertwined with them. Like a snowball effect, controversies surrounding strategies to manage migration and its outcomes heighten concerns within populations and societies about hosting migrants from the Global South.

The imposition of more restrictions fosters a perceived need for protection against potential threats, driving the relentless pursuit of managing irregular flows regardless of the incapacity of local governments in countries of origin and transit to promptly halt border crossings. Despite what was discussed, the documents analysed indicated that the European Union and partners involved in the EUTF were satisfied with the strategies implemented and their results.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

Migration control is a significant political concern for the European Union (Huysmans 2000). In recent decades, the EU has not only adopted a security-focused approach to migration but has also allocated funds to implement initiatives in third countries to address the root causes of displacement. It is clear that the authors generally agree that border control as a migration policy primarily aims to deter people from reaching the Old Continent. This limitation may have prompted the EU to diversify its strategies to manage migration, especially after events such as the Arab Spring and the 2015 refugee crisis. One of the most important recent initiatives was the development and implementation of the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. This policy emphasizes the need for collective action involving different actors in managing migration, fostering continued collaboration and dialogue among them regarding this issue.

Efforts aimed at addressing the root causes of migration, such as the EUTF, mainly focus on economic factors. The main causes for irregular migration, such as a “deteriorated



economic environment” and “youth unemployment”, were identified in the Constitutive Agreement, the first document addressed at the Valletta Summit (European Union 2015, p. 3). It seems that these factors were seen as a major reason for the allocation of a budget aiming to aid local authorities. In response to these issues, the EU and all fund partners have agreed that development assistance and border management, including collaborative efforts to control borders, were essential.

The content analysis of other EUTF documents, such as annual reports, board meetings, and press releases, revealed consistent strategies implemented throughout the policy’s duration. These documents highlighted that the primary focus during the Fund’s implementation in North Africa was border management, with an emphasis on controlling migration along the Mediterranean routes, which continue to be the principal means for irregular flows until recently. Although there are several references to the concern for assisting vulnerable individuals attempting to reach Europe, most of the fund was allocated to migration governance and border protection.

In summary, the reports indicate that the main strategy of the EUTF in North Africa is to enhance migration management and increase opportunities for nationals in their home countries. The results also reveal the need to approve new programs annually, as stated in the press releases. The extension of programs in the EUTF highlights the challenge of quickly reducing irregular migration flows, indicating ongoing difficulties and a lengthy resolution process, including divergences between regions of origin and destination for migrants. These elements may be considered factors for the insufficiency in reducing irregular migration. What responses are viable? Is the EU’s approach of diversifying migration management strategies from the Global South effective in practice? These questions warrant further exploration in future studies.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Data Description on Migration Flows (2015–2020).

Year	Migration Flows from North Africa to the EU	Apprehension of Illegal Migrants by Frontex
2015	280,623	7004
2017	4,631,694	23,063
2019	4,705,002	23,969
2020	5,133,036	17,228

Elaborated by the author. Sources: UNDESA and FRONTEX.

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